

SPOTLIGHT: Blacknecked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

The Blacknecked Stork is a large bird with a massive black beak. Its head and neck are black, glossed with bluish-green, purple and bronze. A broad patch on either side of the body, the primary and greater wing coverts, lower back and the tail are black, glossed with metallic green. Underbody and upper back are white including scapulars and lesser coverts. The legs are coral-red. Males have a brown iris while females have a yellow one. In flight it is white from below with a broad black diagonal band across each wing. (Contra the Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, a winter migrant that has a red bill and the wing are fully black when seen from below).

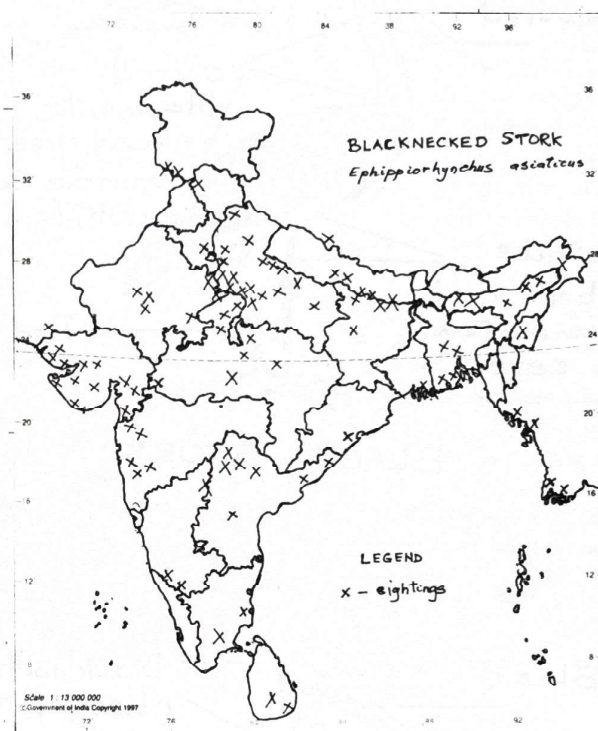
The Blacknecked Stork is usually solitary or in pairs, feeding along riverbanks, tanks, *jheels*, marshes and also at salt-water lagoons. It feeds on fish, frogs, reptiles, crabs, molluscs, etc. On take-off, it flaps its wings heavily and slowly and after attaining height, it glides along smoothly. Sometimes it also soars and circles aloft on thermals.

The breeding season is from September to December. Like other storks, it has an elaborate courtship ritual before pairing. Its nest is a large deep platform of twigs lined with grass and leaves, and is built on top of "peepul" or similar large trees near water or in the midst of cultivation. 3-4 eggs are laid and incubated (duties are shared by both parents) for 30 days.

The typical race is found in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand. In India it is generally distributed in suitable areas as a resident species, seen more in the north than in the south. Though widely distributed, nowhere is it common or abundant. Nor are many old records available of its nesting areas or distribution. The most important site is at the Kaziranga National Park (Assam). Indonesia has recorded more than 350 birds during the Asian

Waterfowl Census. From Andhra Pradesh they have been reported from Borgampad (Khammam District) where it was resident, and also from Srikakulam and Vizianagram.

The other race of the stork *E. australis* is found in New Guinea and Australia where its population seems stable; whereas *E. asiaticus* seems to be decreasing alarmingly and is greatly threatened.



BIRD-WORD: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

Barbs Thread-like delicate, lateral filaments attached to rachis, also called rami.

Barbicels Minute hooks of barbules. The hooks on the anterior barbules hold onto the posterior barbules and lock the barbs together so that the feather makes a firm but flexible surface for striking the air during flight. They are also called hamuli or hooklets.

Barbules An oblique set of filamentous processes fringing the barbs.

Bastard wing Small tuft of feathers attached to the thumb or the first digit, and supported by digit 1 bone. It is also called winglet, alaspuria, allular quills or alula.

Bathing It is body cleaning, either individually or communally and it is considered to be some form of self-stimulation.

—**Dew Bathing** In dew deposited on leaves.

—**Dust Bathing** Several gallinaceous birds such as chicken, partridges, pheasants, quails splash dust of sand over their wings and feathers to dislodge ectoparasites and thus maintain feathers.

—**Sunbathing** Many species of birds sunbathe, extending their wings and spreading their tails or exposing their undersurface to heat.

Belly-soaking It is wetting the belly feathers for the purpose of transporting water to eggs and chicks.

Binomial nomenclature The scientific classification of living organism based on their structure formulated by Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist, in his book, 'Systema Naturae' published in 1758.

Bird banding It is the fixing of a numbered metal ring on the tarsus bone of birds to study individual or groups of birds, also called bird ringing. [Johann Leonhard Frisch of Berlin was the first to fix real string around swallow's legs in 1740 before the autumn migration. However scientific bird banding was started by Christian Mortensen in Denmark. In our country bird ringing was started by the Maharaja of Dhar in M.P. in 1926. Object of banding is (1) to trace the movement of birds, flyways, distribution ranges, (2) to know the life span of individuals within a species (3) to gather information regarding animal life cycles, moult and (4) to determine the population breeding success. Since the metal rings get corroded by bird's acidic excrement leading to inflammation and gangrene of bird's feet, plastic rings are now used in Germany.]